

Chiropractic Found More Effective than Hospital Care in 3-Year

BENEFICIAL EFFECT OF CHIROPRACTIC ON PAIN PARTICULARLY CLEAR

Editorial Staff

The outcome of a Medical Research Council trial at the Medical College of St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, England, comparing chiropractic with conventional hospital treatment for low back pain, reported that those patients treated by chiropractic "derive more benefit and long term satisfaction than those treated by hospitals."

The results of the study, "Randomised comparison of chiropractic and hospital outpatient management for low back pain: results from extended follow up," were published in the Aug. 4, 1995 British Medical Journal.¹

Professor Thomas Meade, and colleagues at the Epidemiology and Medical Care Unit, using the Oswestry questionnaire, compared the progress of 741 low back pain patients (undergoing either chiropractic or hospital treatment) for levels of pain, daily activities, and satisfaction with their treatment. The numbers revealed that during the three years, 29 percent more improved under chiropractic care than those treated by hospital care. "The beneficial effect of chiropractic on pain was particularly clear," the authors stated.

Chiropractic patients also expressed greater general satisfaction with their treatment, slept better, and were able to sit for longer periods. The study further found that, in general, chiropractic patients experienced an improved quality of life following treatment.

This study is a follow up of the 1990 Meade et al. study.² At the time of the 1990 report, not all the 741 patients (ages 18-64) had been in the trial for more than six months. The 1995 follow-up study presents the full results for all those patients, for which data was available, up to three years.

"The Medical Research Council trial shows that patients with back pain can expect better results from their local chiropractors than from their local hospital," says Ian Hutchinson, president of the British Chiropractic Association. "Fortunately, the value of chiropractic is being increasingly recognised, and I hope that following the trial results, NHS purchasers and chiropractors can

now arrange for more patients to benefit from chiropractic treatment," he said.

The scores of the new study on pain intensity before treatment and at the various follow-up periods show a significant improvement in pain "in those treated by chiropractic, including the changes early on -- that is, at six weeks and six months, when the proportions returning questionnaires were high."

The authors noted that other scores (personal care, lifting, walking, standing, sex life, social life, and travelling) "nearly all improved more in the patients treated with chiropractic, though most of the differences were small compared with the differences for pain."

The authors said they believe there is now more support for the need for "fastidious" trials focusing on "specific components of management and on their feasibility," and that the trial's results show that "chiropractic has a valuable part to play in the management of low back pain."

The study comes close on the heels of the recommendations of the British back pain guidelines developed by the Clinical Standards Advisory Group, published as Back Pain, and Epidemiology and Cost of Back Pain.³ Those guidelines recommend that patients should not be put on waiting lists for hospital appointments, as that leads to increased time off work and disability. The British guidelines say that back patients should be seen earlier in the community by chiropractors, osteopaths, and physiotherapists skilled in manipulation.

References

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2. Meade TW, Dyer S, Browne W, Townsend J, Frank AO. Low back pain of mechanical origin: randomised comparison of chiropractic and hospital outpatient treatment. *BMJ* 1990;300:1431-7.
3. Britain releases back pain guidelines, *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Feb. 13, 1995.

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